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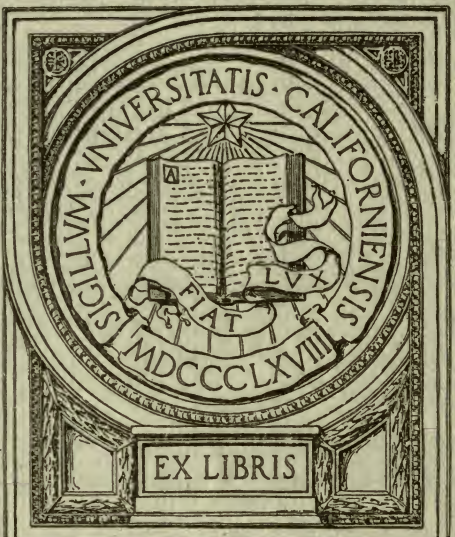
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MR. RUM

By

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A GREAT many attempts have been made to set Mr. Rum right with the public, but they have not been uniformly successful. He has never been properly advertised. Let us, therefore, place him where he belongs. Let us first understand what he means and who he is.

By Mr. Rum I refer, of course, to the whole family of alcohol. I do not mean rum alone. I mean also whisky. I mean pousse cafes and beer and cocktails and cognac and champagne. In short, under whatever form alcohol may come I call it rum—Mr. Rum. I mean it to stand as a representative of drunkenness, disease, death, dipsomania, disintegration, debt, divorce, disgrace, discord and diligent damnation. By diligent damnation I mean the kind that works while you sleep, that sits on the bedpost in the morning and jeers at your seared eyes and your singed nerves, that salivates your sentiments, silts your courage and straps you down to the toboggan, which has no horse power of its own, but develops its speed only on a down grade. Diligent damnation always uses a toboggan, and you never saw one going up hill.

But let us place our old friend Rum where he belongs. Now, there is about him what we may term a subjective and an objective attitude, or we may illustrate the idea by saying that there are two parties to a contract. Rum,

for example, is the party of the first part, and you or I or anybody else may be the party of the second part. Without you or me (the party of the second part), Mr. Rum, the party of the first part, has a pretty hard time of it. He goes about trying to find trouble, and relying upon others to help him. That is one of the singular things about Mr. Rum. He is powerless by himself. He needs a confederate, a side partner, a "pal." You never saw Mr. Rum exhibiting his muscle in a circus ring or walking the tight rope over Niagara. He's what the gamblers call a "four flusher." He travels on a large bluff. He lives on promises to pay and his notes are always coming due. He is always undergoing a process of liquidation.

* * *

If Mr. Rum should put on his best clothes and his sweetest smile, and his most insinuating manner, and should attempt to take a walk through Kansas today—well, we know what kind of reception Mr. Rum would get in Kansas, because we know what has happened to him there already. Consequently, so far as Kansas is concerned, rum is a nonentity. In Kansas there is no party of the second part. And yet it was only the other day that my friend, William Allen White, was asking everybody, "What's the matter with Kansas?"

You see, therefore, that the trouble (and

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there seems to be trouble over Mr. Rum, for everybody knows somebody who seems to have been ruined by him) about Mr. Rum is the invitation which is always extended to him by somebody else. He never comes up to your house in the dead of night, rings the door bell and insists upon entering. Mr. Rum is usually introduced, quite frequently by some kind friend, and curiously everybody warns you about him before you meet him. The ones who know him best are oftentimes the ones who warn you about him most. They say, "I know him, my boy, I can't get rid of him; take the advice of one who has been there and avoid him."

Another thing about Mr. Rum is that at first he is always unpleasant—in fact, he is apt to be sickening. It takes a long time to get on good terms with him, and you, the party of the second part, do most of the work. Mr. Rum stands around with his hands in his pockets smoking cigarettes, and you have to urge him to be your friend. Why? Well, maybe you're lonesome. Maybe you want to be entertained—to forget yourself. Maybe you're morally lazy and are ashamed of your own natural resources. When Mr. Rum has gotten used to you and you have gotten used to him, you begin to realize that he has come to stay. You suddenly try to kick him out, but the next day you find him sitting in the

same old place with a quiet smile on his face, saying: "Old man, don't blame me. Remember that you asked me to come. I was here by special invitation and you cannot get rid of me so easy."

One of the peculiar things about Mr. Rum that is characteristic is his infinite patience. How different he is, for example, from Mr. Prussic Acid. When you invite Mr. Prussic Acid into your house, the moment he opens the door he loses no time. The only sure way is to call up the undertaker before he comes. But Mr. Rum goes about it in an entirely different way. In the first place, he is very adaptive; among gentlemen he is a gentleman, and among toughs he is a tough. He moves in all grades of society (always by special invitation). The argument used in his favor is that, take him little by little, not only will he do you no harm, but he is an agreeable companion and serves to pass the time away. Mr. Rum doesn't say this, mind you. It is always said for him by those who have fastened him to them, and don't want to let on that he isn't the best thing in the world. And isn't that human, after all? When you were a small boy and fell into a puddle that didn't appear to be so deep as it really was, think of the energy you expended afterwards in getting all the other boys in the neighborhood to do the same thing! You'd dare them, wouldn't you?

And work on their sympathies and appeal to their latent manhood—just to get them caught in that puddle.

Now we all know, or at least we should know, if we have had any experience with life, that one of the great tests of a man's common sense is his ability to select his associates. Rothschild laid down the rule that every young man who wished to be successful should make a point to associate with people who were successful. We know that the test of sense in business management is the ability to select good men. Did you ever hear of the head of a great business house putting Mr. Rum on the pay roll? And yet Mr. Rum is so adaptable, so ready to go anywhere and, according to the statements insinuated by his boon companions, is thoroughly companionable and steadfast. Perseverance is one of the great qualities that go to make success; consider the perseverance of Mr. Rum. Yet you never see him presiding over directors' meetings. He couldn't operate a typewriter or a motor car. Mr. Rum never won an international championship. He doesn't know how to hold a baby, or ride a bicycle, or talk straight English. He can't even stand up without leaning against someone. Yet the boy you used to know, and envy, who maybe stood at the head of his class at school, whose mother used to be afraid that he would get to be presi-

dent of the United States too soon for his health—this boy comes up to you years later and says (with a sickly leer), "I want to introduce my ol' fren' Misher Rum. Bes' fren' I ever had. Couldn't get 'long 'thout him."

* * *

Now, what is the actual truth about Mr. Rum? It is really quite simple. Being himself a purely negative character, he responds to a certain defect in our own souls. You can plaster the state of Kansas everywhere with placards stating what a fine companion Mr. Rum is, but there would be no response, because the people of Kansas have discovered that the need which they feel for certain things, and which other people have come to express in terms of rum, is no longer felt by them. This need is expressed by them for other things which they have learned are better than rum, for fresh air, for healthy occupations, for clean thoughts; in fact, for all of the high-minded activities that come with a well ordered brain and a wholesome human organism.

Then it is perfectly easy to understand about Mr. Rum if you only stop to look him over, to "size him up"—so to speak. You would do this with anyone you meet—why not with Mr. Rum? You wouldn't go out into the streets and drag the first stranger you saw into your home, would you—to sit by your

fireside, next to your wife and children? If you wouldn't do that with a stranger, why with a character like Mr. Rum, whose reputation for diligent damnation has spread all over the world? And above all, don't feel sorry for him. If he is so companionable you need feel no compunctions over leaving him to himself. If, as he is inclined to hint, and his victims declare, his condition is so desirable, surely then, consorting with himself is the best thing that could happen to him.

Why not let him do it? Why not let him be, not so patient with others, as with himself? Let him enjoy himself. Let him perpetuate a society in which he shall be the solitary member.

As for ourselves, let us also feel that we are capable of enjoying ourselves without him—enjoying the honest and proper development of our own natural resources, while we are able to look straight into the eyes of those we love most, without the secret shame that we have been so weak and so unintelligent as to bind ourselves for life to a total stranger, who is perpetuated solely through the moral cowardice of mankind.

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